



**Leeds**  
CITY COUNCIL

# Appendix 1

## Executive Board: 18 October 2023

An annual update on migration activity in Leeds



## Contents

Introduction.....	4
Governance.....	4
<b>Leeds Strategic Migration Board</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Leeds Migrant Health Board</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Leeds Migration Partnership</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Migration Trends in Leeds.....	9
Migration Schemes.....	10
<b>Asylum</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Resettlement scheme</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Homes for Ukraine</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Hong Kong British National (Overseas)</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>EU Settlement Scheme</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Projects, Communications and Engagement.....	24
<b>Council of Sanctuary</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Migrant Access Project</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Migration Training</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>New to Leeds</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Leeds ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Leeds Volunteering Interpreting Service</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Refugee Week</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Windrush</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Equality Assembly</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Current issues.....	28
<b>Illegal Migration Act 2023</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Conflict in Sudan</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Cross-council working.....	29
<b>LAASLO (Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison)</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Destitution.....	30
Gypsy Roma Travellers team.....	31
Domestic Violence and Abuse.....	31
Locality Working.....	33
International.....	36
<b>International relations</b> .....	<b>36</b>

**Intercultural Cities Network (ICC) .....36**

## Introduction

The International Organisation for Migration defines a migrant as:

*'any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. IOM concerns itself with migrants and migration-related issues and, in agreement with relevant States, with migrants who are in need of international migration services.'*

*'Although there is no universally accepted definition of the term, an international migrant has been defined for statistical purposes as a person who changes his or her country of usual residence. A long-term migrant is a person who establishes residence in a different country for a period of at least a year, while a short-term migrant moves to a country for a period of at least three months but less than a year. While most refugees are migrants according to these definitions, it should be noted that refugees are governed by a distinct legal framework. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol define a refugee as any person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection in that country".'*

The term 'migration' therefore covers a wide range of communities from economic migrants to those seeking asylum, fleeing war and persecution, and the diversity of these groups in Leeds has continued to enrich the city.

Leeds City Council recognises migration as a key development consideration to integrate into wider agendas as we see ongoing changes at a **global** level as well as significant **national** policy changes which have an impact on services and **local** demographics.

The **Best City Ambition** is an overall vision to **tackle poverty and inequality** and **improve quality of life for everyone** who calls Leeds their home. As a **welcoming and compassionate** city, Leeds recognises the **positive contributions** made by migrants but also recognises the **challenges** this brings both to the city and to new migrants themselves. Migrant communities are **valuable contributors** to the city's **economy, culture and diversity** and Leeds aspires to ensure people are **welcomed and supported**. Leeds has a **long-held commitment to support asylum seekers and refugees** and is dedicated to being a City of Sanctuary. The council's recent pledge to become a Local Authority of Sanctuary demonstrates this commitment.

## Governance

### Leeds Strategic Migration Board

The Leeds Strategic Migration Board is the council's **governance arrangement for managing migration in the city**. This board is chaired by the Chief Officer for Safer Stronger Communities, bringing together members across the city including local authority partners, public, private and voluntary sectors. This year saw the Executive Board Member for Communities joining the Leeds Strategic Migration Board, providing positive **political representation** and a wider political aspect on migration for the city.

The board continues to table key thematic discussions impacting on the city and services to improve outcomes and service delivery under the migration agenda. This year, **Leeds Housing Service** shared how the service is delivering against the migration strategy and followed up with partnership discussions with the **Leeds Migration Partnership** and **Department for Work and Pensions**.

The cost-of-living crisis was also a key item discussed at the board, led by Chapeltown Citizens Advice and providing an insight into the impact on migrant communities. This has resulted in further

positive links to join up approaches including the State of the City event that focused on the cost-of-living crisis.

There are a range of forums and partnerships across the city that represent the **voice of people with lived experience**. The board discussed how people with lived experience can influence decisions to improve learning and service delivery. These forums and partnerships are being explored to enhance voice and influence at this board.

The Department for Work and Pensions have a range of specialist services providing additional help and **support to access employment** and there are many good examples of strengthened partnerships such as with the **Leeds Resettlement team**. Further discussions have led to a more detailed insight of the work of the **Social Justice team** and how access and support for the most vulnerable can be maximised through the partnerships at this board.

The city recognises the growing concern of the **lack of advice and legal representation** in the city for those that require legal advice on their immigration status. This topic was discussed and represented by the Leeds Migration Partnership at the board in July 2023 where opportunities were discussed to mitigate the risks of the current situation. The council has further discussed opportunities with the third sector to offer financial support through a grant process which is described on page 13.

Migration Yorkshire continue to provide the **national context** in relation to policy changes and service considerations at a local level.

## Leeds Migrant Health Board

The Leeds Migrant Health Board's (MHB) purpose is to significantly improve health outcomes for Leeds migrant communities by providing a strategic, citywide approach to understanding and addressing migrant health needs in Leeds. It's current priorities focus on:

- Communication
- Access
- Work and austerity

The Board works collaboratively across the health system to identify and address the key issues that create inequalities in health between our migrant population and the rest of the population of Leeds. It comprises partners, including the NHS, local authority and voluntary and community partners, including organisations who work directly with asylum seekers and refugees.

The Board aims to be the voice, champion change and shine a spotlight on the good work being delivered in the city by a compassionate and valued workforce including partners who go above and beyond to advocate for migrants despite working in extremely difficult times. The Board continues to address wider determinants of health and a vision where people are not treated as illegal humans and are given the respect and compassion they are entitled to, feel welcomed and part of our society, and receive the services they deserve.

Too often migrants face barriers in accessing the most basic services alongside the health care they have a right to access. These barriers can be structural including a lack of information on their rights and entitlements. Further challenges experienced by migrant communities include the impact of wider circumstances on their health such as poverty, poor housing or homelessness; lack of access to primary care and trauma informed services; racism; unemployment; isolation and vulnerability e.g. to PTSD; hostility and prejudice from communities in areas across the city; learning a new language and managing without familiar support networks e.g. family, friends, faith; connecting with peer support networks

The MHB's priorities are:

1. Access for all - learn from lived experience work to shape services and strategies.
2. Communication (in its broadest sense interpretation, translations, accessible information and involvement in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and learning English agenda in Leeds)
3. Work and Austerity (including employment, workforce equipped to respond to new and emerging communities / ensure link to austerity agendas)

and are underpinned by the following principles:

- Excellent experience for migrants
- Equitable access
- Trauma informed approaches
- Working collaboratively across the health, care and Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) systems

Over the last 12 months Board partners have invested in actions that support these three priorities.

## 1. Access

**3-month wellbeing project** for people seeking asylum to improve awareness and access to a range of services and support available including Community Hubs, Active Leeds, Libraries, Museums and Galleries, Parks and Countryside, the Faith sector and voluntary sector.

The **financial hardship** of refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds is very disparate. Leeds Refugee Forum worked alongside asylum seekers to promote active travel and reduce social isolation whilst increasing physical activity and increased green spaces access. Support was provided to encourage use of local transport (travel cards) and access services they would not have been able to without this intervention. It evaluated positively through using the 5 Ways to Wellbeing tool and showed improved mental wellbeing, increased access to services and reduced social isolation.

Members have continued to advocate for **access to oral health** for people seeking asylum and refugees. The pilot service in two dental surgeries has now been funded longer term through the Board advocating for this service. Members of the Board have worked closely with regional colleagues to produce information on oral health in West Yorkshire and share accessible resources. Partners, particularly Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network (LASSN) and Positive Action For Refugees and Asylum Seekers (PAFRAS), continue to advocate and escalate access issues.

Three Target sessions, around the **Safe Surgeries Programme**, were delivered to primary care staff by Doctors of the World. A total number of 629 attendees across all events raising awareness, encouraging practices to join the safer surgeries and challenge any barriers in accessing care. This work aligns with the West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership (WY HCP) who were recognised as the first Partnership of Sanctuary in the country for going above and beyond to welcome people seeking sanctuary into West Yorkshire. To date, Leeds has over 40 safe surgeries.

**Ukrainian /Afghan health assessments within primary care** teams completed health assessments and support to access registered practices and ensured strengthening of continuity of care as people move around the city.

**Cancer Screening Awareness Project** awareness of early cancer prevention/screening and signpost people to local GP services as highlighted in the MAP section on page 25.

**Leeds Health Awareness** service has successfully worked with partners in the city to increase access to cardiovascular disease prevention/management programmes with migrant communities.

## 2. Communication

**Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust** held workshops with their engagement champions following the Healthwatch report on barriers to action, to understand what is already working and barriers faced. Wider communication actions were made as a result of this, including improved

recording of language requirements and simplifying appointments and communications in local languages to assure that interpreters have been booked. This work was in partnership with PAFRAS who encouraged changing the way the trust communicates; culminating in a positive celebration event in March and further work with PAFRAS with a focus on reducing inequalities on waiting lists and continuously reviewing data.

**West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (WYICB)** are proactively using Healthwatch-developed resources and engagement for those who do not speak English as a first language. The WYICB promote good practice and evaluate effectiveness in primary care settings whilst undertaking practice change models.

**Healthwatch, LASSN and PAFRAS** have been key partners in bringing voices of the unheard to the fore in multifaceted actions this year alone and the work they undertake is vital for both refugees and service providers.

### **3. Work and Austerity**

All cost-of-living programmes undertaken by partners have included concerns faced by refugees and poverty problems, so they are not further excluded. The Board has shared good practice from Leeds at regional level particularly focusing on its input to broader citywide partner (VCS) key work themes which include:

1. Funding work streams and grant opportunities.
2. Welfare advice and training toolkits (knowing what it looks like for migrants and understanding rights and what they are eligible for);
3. Communications and Campaigns (ensuring they are fit for purpose);
4. Practical support for food, fuel, and warm spaces.
5. Early intelligence of issues ensuring system awareness and appropriate planning for resources and response.

Anchor organisations are addressing and encouraging recruitment of local communities including migrants to reflect our diverse and capable communities. Healthcare providers actively engage with overseas nurses, doctors and dentists who reside in the UK and support people through applications and processes.

The Board recognises the following current challenges in relation to migrant health:

- Mental wellbeing of our migrant community
- Ever-changing national policy and top-down diktat, which is interpreted as hostile, encouraging a two-tier system where migrants are disadvantaged purposefully to dissuade them seeking asylum in the UK.
- Delivering quality services in the current economic climate with reduced budgets from all partners whilst migrant communities are experiencing increased health inequalities from the pandemic.
- Future arrangements with dispersal claims are a rapid cause for concern and will have an impact on migrants' health and wellbeing and local services
- Exhausted and burnt-out workforce/volunteers who tirelessly champion migrant health inequalities work to counterbalance impact the above

The Board next steps are:

- Review and learn from collective actions undertaken over the year, particularly around services that have actively engaged with migrant communities
- build on good practice where increased understanding of need and reduced barriers to access, is evident.
- Continue to strengthen the voice, action and advocacy for migrant communities to reduce health inequalities, amidst concern that national and local issues exacerbate exclusion and poorer health outcomes.

- Support the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) to champion specific actions and ensure they consider migrant issues as part of an inclusive health approach.

## Leeds Migration Partnership

Leeds Migration Partnership (LMP) is led by the **migrant third sector** with facilitation support provided by Leeds City Council Migration and Third Sector team. LMP brings together organisations, groups, volunteers and individuals to meet, think and share information to support partnership working. Key to their approach is ensuring the **voices of migrants are heard and influence decision makers**.

LMP operates within three distinct areas:

1. **LMP information** - takes the form of an online blog where anyone can share information on local migration issues. The blog provides essential ongoing communications between third sector, statutory services and volunteers on a wide range of local migration issues such as policy, funding, training, service provision and community group activities. The number of people who subscribe to weekly LMP mailings has increased by 8% from 612, and unique users have grown by about 10% to 22,000 people a year. LASSN has maintained the LMP blog since conception as part of its contribution to the sector. Following a public appeal in March 2023 to assist with the website hosting costs, a donation from Leeds City Council's Safer Stronger Communities team was made which covered these costs for one year until March 2024.
2. **LMP Operational Group** – consists of organisations, groups, volunteers and individuals who meet quarterly to share information, good practice and challenges in relation to migrant communities and the sector. These discussions **inform partnership working approaches** and the priorities for the partnership. At times issues can be progressed locally, for example in early 2023 LMP partners shared concerns around migrant communities' accessibility to support to find housing and to address private rented accommodation issues. An information session facilitated by Leeds Housing Options and Private Rented Service enabled the sharing of key information with the migrant third sector, to **improve community knowledge and confidence to access support**, as well as improving insight into the current housing pressures locally and nationally. Information was then shared on the LMP blog for broader partner engagement. Other challenges are more complex to address such as the local response to the Home Office's Streamlined Asylum Process whereby legal advice and support is virtually non-existent; LMP however remains vital for sharing information and partnership working approaches to enable local services to better respond to client need.
3. **LMP Strategy Group** – meets on a quarterly basis to ensure the partnership has clear priorities and goals based on what is important to migrant groups. **The current priorities for LMP are around health, housing, learning and employment, safety and inclusion, access to legal advice and the cost-of-living crisis.** Over the last year thematic meetings have taken place around: legal advice and representation, the cost-of-living crisis in response to the current pressures, and Modern-Day Slavery and the recently re-opened family reunion service to establish ongoing partnership working arrangements.

**Task Groups** are established as required, currently the lack of legal advice and representation is a national concern. A specialist session on the matter highlighted the overarching conclusion there is **insufficient free or low-cost immigration asylum advice available**, and this leaves people at **risk**. Recent research has identified there is no legal aid available in West Yorkshire until 2024. LMP initiated a task group to consider the issue and ways in which this could be addressed locally. A partnership of organisations working on this agenda have met regularly and informed LMP and



Leeds Strategic Migration Board of the current position. The task group are working to establish a volunteer-led pilot project with OISC (Office of Immigration Services Commissioner) level 1 provision as one of the methods of addressing need. This approach would be supervised by registered experienced organisations and would free up capacity for higher level immigration advice. Crucially, this would build community intelligence in understanding good immigration advice and generate pathways into employment.

**Partnership working** LMP also operates in partnership with **Migrant Homelessness Charter**, **Refugees and Asylum Seekers Mental Health Network** and **Third Sector Leeds**. LMP is represented at the Leeds Strategic Migration Board, Leeds Migrant Health Board and Migration Yorkshire's West Yorkshire Sub Regional Migration Group to feed in good practice and share concerns in relation to migration with key partners across the city and region.

## Migration Trends in Leeds

The two main datasets used to understand local migration trends are **census data** and **National Insurance Number (NINO)** applications. This data shows how the pattern of migration is changing and how our local population is affected.

The 2021 census for Leeds highlights that 26.6% of the population (811,956) is of ethnic minority groups (compared to 18.9% at the last census in 2011), 15.8% are born outside of the UK (compared to 11.1% at the 2011 census) and 1.5% arrived in the UK between 2020-21. The 2021 census also highlights that 26.6% of the population in Leeds are from 287 unique ethnic groups representing 69 nationalities from 56 different countries. In the city the largest broad ethnic group category within the 2021 census is the 'Asian and Asian British' population, proportionally however, the largest increase in Leeds was the 'Black, Black British, Caribbean or African' group which saw a 75% increase.

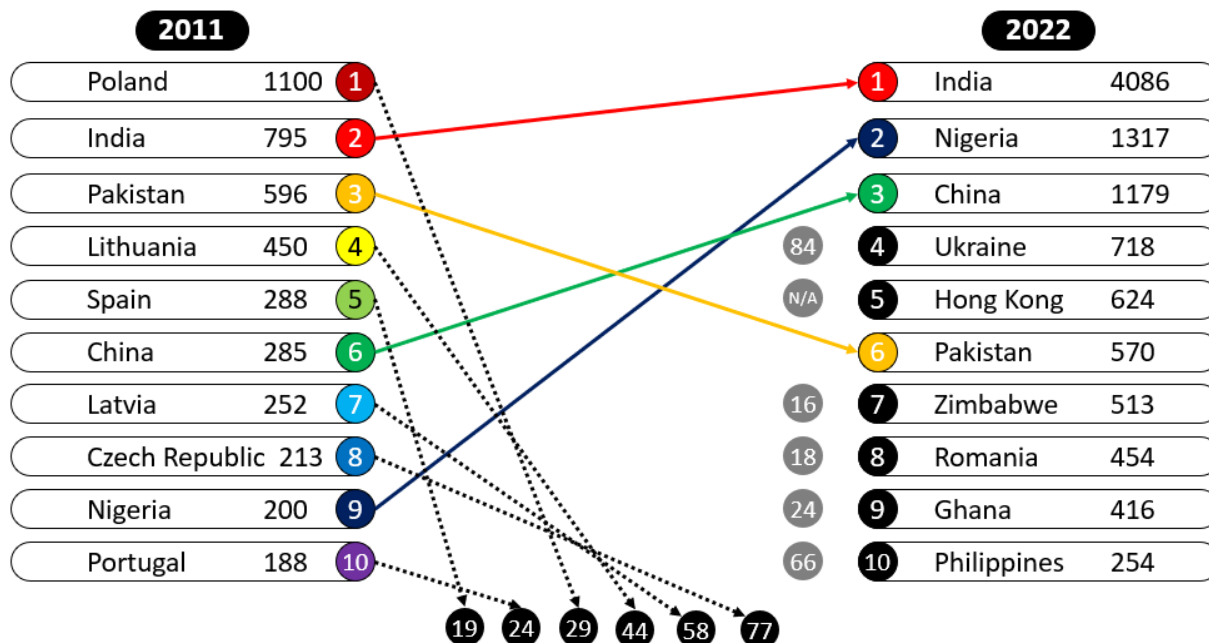
### Work

National Insurance Number (NINO) data has been provided by Migration Yorkshire and uses information from the Department for Work and Pensions about non-British nationals who successfully applied for a NINO in 2022. We have used this as a proxy for newcomers, because new arrivals usually need to apply for a NINO to work or claim benefits. It must be noted that there are several caveats to using NINO datasets, as this does not include those who are under the age of 16, those who are seeking asylum and therefore unable to register, students without rights to work and those who may obtain a NINO outside of Leeds. In addition, the publication of NINO data was disrupted in 2020 due to COVID-19, and then suspended from June 2021 until early 2023. Therefore, the figures under migration and work for 2021 were essentially based on half a year due to the disruption to the statistics.

NINO datasets show that over 95,000 people have successfully applied in Leeds between 2011 (the year of the previous census) and 2022. Between 2011 and 2021, the average number of registrations per year was approximately 7,300. Arrivals to Leeds increased in 2022 as 93% more people arrived compared to 2021, whereas across the UK immigration increased by 71%. In 2022 there were 15,339 new arrivals to Leeds from a total of 124 countries with a slightly higher percentage of female (52%) than male (48%). The areas in Leeds where most newcomers are settling are in Little London and Woodhouse, Headingley and Hyde Park and Kirkstall. The top 10 nationalities registering for a NINO in 2022 (in ranking order) were India, Nigeria, China, Ukraine, Hong Kong, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Romania, Ghana and the Philippines. Comparing this to 2011, the top 10 nationalities were Poland, India, Pakistan, Lithuania, Spain, China, Latvia, Czech Republic, Nigeria and Portugal.

The table below shows how significantly the nationality ranking has changed as over 83% (12,757) of new arrivals now come from outside of Europe. This group has increased by more than 100%, while the greatest change in individual nationalities compared to 2021 has been an increase of 2,405 arrivals from India. Arrivals from Europe have increased by 24% since 2021 and are split 58%

(1,498) from EU countries and 42% (1,084) from non-EU countries in 2022. This group is predominantly composed of Romanian arrivals, with 454 NINOs issued in 2022.



### Study

There were 14,795 international students registered at a Higher Education institution in Leeds in the 2021-2022 academic year, an increase of over 1,600 overseas students compared with the previous year. 90% came from outside the EU.

### Protection

There were 75,492 asylum applications (relating to 91,047 people) in the UK in the year ending March 2023. This is 33% more applications than in the year ending March 2022 (56,560, relating to 66,838 people). Whilst some progress with awarding decisions has been made, at the end of March 2023, there were 133,607 cases (relating to 172,758 people) awaiting an initial decision. This is 50% more than the number of applications awaiting an initial decision at the end of March 2022 (89,344, relating to 109,735 people). [How many people do we grant protection to? - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Some asylum seekers are housed and supported in Leeds through the Home Office dispersal system. Published Home Office figures show that at the end of March 2023, 1,184 people seeking asylum were being supported in Leeds while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim (known as Section 95 support), 1,059 people were being accommodated, and there were 34 people receiving subsistence-only support i.e., no accommodation. There were also around 77 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being looked after by the local authority at the end of March 2022. These are children who are in the UK without family and have claimed asylum in their own right. They are separate to the dispersal system for asylum seekers described above. Those granted protection by the Home Office may then stay in the area as refugees. Other groups of refugees are resettled directly from another country through other schemes. People seeking asylum are also currently residing in local hotels.

## Migration Schemes

### Asylum

Asylum continues to be a major topic of discussion nationally, with **ongoing policy announcements**, and debates on **new legislation** in parliament. The Nationality and Borders Act

2022 came into force on 28 June 2022 which introduced an overhaul of the UK's asylum system and made several amendments to immigration and nationality law. In addition, the Prime Minister made five promises in January 2023 to tackle priority issues, one of them being to stop small boats crossing the English Channel in an effort to reduce illegal migration.

On 23 February 2023, the government introduced the **Streamlined Asylum Process (SAP)** to address the backlog of asylum claims still awaiting an initial decision. The process involves completing a questionnaire (form) instead of having an interview. This fast track of decisions was developed with the intention of clearing cases that are considered well-founded (and which were lodged before the Nationality and Borders Act 2022) with a view to making a quick grant of protection status. The fast track initially applied to five nationalities: Afghan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen. However, further nationalities were added to the process to include Iraq, Iran and Sudan.

On 19 June Leeds City Council were notified of **hotel optimisation** to reduce the need for more hotels and deliver the best value for money. This means that Home Office accommodation providers were instructed to 'optimise' the existing space through room sharing within the existing hotel estate. Statutory services in Leeds outlined the implications that room sharing may have on services and service users and the council officially notified Mears (the contracted asylum accommodation provider) of this.

On the 8 September, Leeds City Council was notified that hotel optimisation will be in a hotel in Leeds during September.

Using hotels has taken place over recent years, and the council does not have the power to overturn Home Office decisions to procure hotels in the city or any other contingency sites. However, the council works closely with Mears and more recently regional partnership meetings with the Home Office have been established for ongoing dialogue. Leeds continues to represent at regional meetings led and facilitated by Migration Yorkshire and have worked closely with colleagues to raise concerns, share challenges and good practice.

The **Migrant Champions Network** [home \(migrantchampionsnetwork.org\)](http://migrantchampionsnetwork.org) is a cross-party network of local authority councillors committed to championing migrants' rights in their council areas that argues that whilst numbers of asylum applications are 160% higher than five years ago – during the same period, the backlog of applications has ballooned to five times its original size. This is because the Home Office is taking much longer to decide applications. Further information on how the council can support can be found at [Guide to supporting people in temporary asylum accommodation \(migrantchampionsnetwork.org\)](http://migrantchampionsnetwork.org). This document is also helpful to understand the rationale of Home Office procuring hotels across the country.

### **Asylum dispersal**

Last year the government brought in **full dispersal** to expand their existing approach of using private rental sector housing to **all local authority areas** across England, Scotland and Wales. An informal consultation with local authorities was launched to inform how this model will work. This would also provide specific funding to recognise the existing contribution of local authorities and for new dispersed accommodation. The aim of full dispersal is to reduce and end the use of hotels by allowing the Home Office to procure properties in all local authority areas. The longer-term plan is to design a reformed asylum dispersal system across England, Scotland and Wales to ensure fairness and sustainability, collaboration and innovative responses to changing demands and needs.

**Leeds has continued to welcome vulnerable individuals and families** to the city, supporting those in hotels as well as in the community. The city has seen an increase of those coming to the city as part of the dispersal process, with increasing numbers proposed to be accommodated in hotels as well as an increase in both the numbers and homes used in the wider city. Over the last year we have seen an increase in the number of homes used for accommodating those in need. This has resulted in a change of approach from the use of landlord properties to Mears increasingly purchasing their own stock for asylum property procurement as it becomes harder to find suitable

rented homes. There has been an increase in requests for properties to be considered for asylum dispersal over the last year. In addition, the Home Office is seemingly making adjudications in favour of Mears where the council has indicated a property to be unsuitable to use. This has seen an increase in homes being removed from similar markets which Leeds City Council targets as part of its homelessness prevention work, resulting in increasing pressure on others seeking homes in the lower rental/housing market.

Leeds City Council continue discussions with Mears and the Home Office of the position in Leeds regarding property procurement and local pressures in relation to access to services and school places.

The **government has proposed to change the Housing Act 2004 legislation** to try and support the dispersal process. A recent announcement [Houses in Multiple Occupation \(Asylum-Seeker Accommodation\)\(England\) Regulations 2023, House of Lords, 16 May 2023 | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/houses-multiple-occupation-asylum-seeker-accommodationengland) <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/houses-multiple-occupation-asylum-seeker-accommodationengland> proposes a legislative change to temporarily exempt accommodation asylum seeker accommodation from houses in multiple occupation (HMO) licensing requirements. These HMOs will be exempt for a two-year period following the date the accommodation begins use as asylum accommodation. This change has yet to be implemented as it requires Parliament to agree the change as it is not within the Secretary of States powers to do so. It was proposed to come into effect earlier in the year but has yet to be voted on. It will remove all new properties which would have been covered by mandatory HMO licencing from the need to have a licence so removing the need to meet minimum prescribed standards for such properties as described by Part 2 of the Housing Act 2004. Any properties which already require a licence will continue to do so as well as be required to renew that licence if it expires in the two-year period. There will still be a need to meet other requirements under the legislation in relation to standards of accommodation.

Migration Yorkshire continues to bring regional local authorities together bi-weekly to feed into national government on local impact. Leeds continues to attend these meetings to actively engage as well as with the Strategic Migration Partnership and the West Yorkshire Sub Regional meetings. This is a valued opportunity in coming together as a region for peer support.

### **Home Office Asylum Dispersal Grant for Local Authorities**

The Home Office have created the Asylum Dispersal Grant which opened between 28 March 2022 and 31 March 2023 to support local authorities through payments of £3500 per new and occupied bedspace. This payment is to address the concerns raised by local authorities in relation to pressure on local services associated with supporting people seeking asylum. In addition, the grant will support local authorities through grant payments of £750 per asylum seeker in Home Office supported asylum seeker accommodation as of 1 April 2023.

### **Grant Funding to Support People Seeking Asylum in Leeds 2023 – 2025**

As a result of the above government funding and in responding to the present situation in the city, Leeds City Council established a grant funding opportunity for third sector organisations in Leeds to apply for funding to support people seeking asylum and newly granted refugees who are subject to a 28-day move-on period. Our aim is to support people seeking asylum, and newly granted refugees to access appropriate, efficient, and effective support and services in Leeds. Consultation has taken place with Leeds Migration Partnership (LMP), as valued partners with significant expertise, to seek insights into the current asylum pressures in Leeds. LMP verified key concerns and priority areas which resonated with the council's perspectives, these include:

- The ongoing and increased use of contingency accommodation which gives rise to concerns regarding the lack of integration, social isolation and the overall wellbeing of the residents.
- The lack of legal aid provision and the significant decrease in good quality free or low-cost asylum-related immigration advice.

- Appropriate case work support for people going through the asylum process pre and post decision.
- Newly granted refugees during the 28-day move-on period and the lack of accommodation giving rise to the potential risk of homelessness. Furthermore, the reduced access to appropriate support to aid with access to benefits, health and employment.
- The ongoing need for ESOL and English language learning provision including the development of digital access and skills.
- The increasing need for a single point of access for people seeking asylum and the impact on specialist services who are stretched to meet the demand on a wide range of need.
- The increasing need for advice and guidance for this client group whose immigration status mean they require specialist services with the right expertise and understanding.
- The mental health and wellbeing of clients challenged by a complex and isolating asylum system.

This grant funding will enable 18 months of programmes, projects and activity which will improve accessibility, coordination across the city, and outcomes for people going through the asylum process in Leeds. The aim is to work with organisations with the expertise to deliver, to build on existing structures, and develop strong and effective working relationships with appropriate partners across the city. The total amount of grant funding available is £600,000 with organisations having the option to apply for a minimum of £5,000 or a maximum of £50,000. The application deadline is 16 October 2023. <sup>[OBJ]</sup>

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

The ongoing **changes to legislation** will further impact on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and families. There are three specific groups of children that Leeds City Council Children Services offer support to. These are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs), Dublin III ‘type’ children – a regulation where each asylum-seeking child shall only have their application considered in one of the countries participating in the cooperation – and families who have no recourse to public funds.

The UASCs are numerically the highest number of children that are supported in Leeds of these three groups. Children in all three above categories have been impacted by the legislative and non-legislative changes over the past couple of years. These changes include legislative – Nationality and Borders Act 2022, Illegal Migration Act 2023, Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020, Judicial Review dated 27 July 2023 [Brighton Hove Vs Home Office](#). The non-legislative changes include funding arrangements for UASCs Home Office Guidance, funding arrangements for NRPF families and Home Office guidance on dispersal of adult asylum seekers and hotel capacity.

### National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

Leading up to the pandemic 2020, Children’s Services in Leeds City Council was experiencing significant numbers of UASCs arriving in Leeds sporadically. That is, young people making their way from the south coast and east coast of the UK often in lorries that had come over from the ports. This flow of sporadic young arrivals significantly slowed down before the pandemic and ceased altogether. This slow down and eventual end was due to significant security measures put in place on the French coastal ports and the UK entry ports. During this period, 2019-2021 local authorities (LAs) including Leeds received a set amount of funding for sporadic arrivals. However, that funding was and is less than the cost of supporting those UASCs. Up until the summer of 2021 the NTS scheme was voluntary for all LAs. Some LAs cooperated with that scheme and took UASCs, and others did not. At the point of arrival, the Home Office, in their view, have assessed each and every one of those ‘adults’ to ensure that when dispersed they are not moving children. However, and unfortunately, upon arrival in Leeds the hotel welfare officers have raised concerns about a number of those adults that they suspect are children. This results in a referral direct to

## Resettlement scheme

Following the large-scale evacuation from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the subsequent crisis, the number of individuals being evacuated to the UK increased significantly. In response, the government sought assistance from local authorities to provide additional accommodation options.

The Home Office requested local authorities to swiftly find accommodation and devised a new plan to temporarily house individuals on the relocation scheme. Bradford became the first location to establish a 'holding hotel' for arrivals on the Afghan Relocation scheme. Due to the urgent need for accommodation and the rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, the Home Office had to explore expedited solutions.

In early September 2021, the Home Office secured the use of bridging hotels across the UK. In Leeds, it was agreed that the Resettlement team from Leeds City Council would provide comprehensive support services for the individuals accommodated in the hotels.

### **Bridging hotel support**

Local authorities received government funding to deliver the wrap around support to residents staying in the hotels, starting with the Holiday Inn in Garforth.

Leeds City Council's Resettlement team worked hard to ensure the wellbeing of Afghan refugees residing in hotels by offering support and addressing their immediate and future requirements. Initial needs assessments were conducted to identify essential and long-term needs of families and arranged for necessary services within the hotel. This encompassed healthcare, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) support, education, mental health assistance through SOLACE and the Children and Families wellbeing project, employment and skills training including ESOL and police support. NHS registrations and midwife appointments were maintained. Regular fortnightly meetings were held with all the services involved in the hotel to discuss issues, provide updates, and explore avenues for service improvement.

Ongoing collaboration with the voluntary sector persisted to facilitate activities that prioritised the unique requirements of women and girls, ensuring their active involvement, accessibility, and engagement. Additionally, the needs of other marginalised or disadvantaged groups were considered during the planning and implementation process. The partnership with local groups remained a crucial component of integration.

Residents were supported to enjoy important celebratory dates, the Home Office ensured the provision of a shuttle bus to the mosque each Friday, allowing individuals to attend prayers. This service was also extended during Eid celebrations, facilitating transportation for the community. Christmas parties and discos were also enjoyed by the residents.

In January 2023, the Mercure Hotel Wetherby, a second bridging hotel in Leeds, was opened.

Finding school places for children in Wetherby proved challenging as the local schools were at maximum capacity. However, despite these challenges, all children did eventually secure a school place.

An example includes a girl who had relocated from London was scheduled to take her GCSE exams in the summer of 2023, returned to London to complete her exams. The local authority and the Home Office provided support to this young girl and her family during this process. This included one to one tuition to support with time missed due to the relocation.

Throughout the duration of the hotels, SOLACE consistently provided their mental health and wellbeing services in Garforth and Wetherby. They conducted both group sessions and one-on-one

sessions for individuals who sought support. The attendance numbers varied during the period when the hotels were operational, depending on the individuals' levels of stress and anxiety.

A therapist from Children and Families wellbeing project dedicated a day each week to visit Garforth. During these sessions, both group and one-on-one sessions took place. The focus of the group sessions was on women and their overall wellbeing. While some women preferred individual sessions, others found solace in being part of a group. Crafts were incorporated as a means to facilitate conversations about emotions for several weeks. This group proved to be beneficial for everyone involved, as even those who were less inclined to talk openly were content to engage in activities such as crocheting or knitting.

It was recognised that many women experienced isolation which impacted on their mental wellbeing. To address this issue, a residents meeting was organised exclusively for women to seek their input on activities they would like to engage in. Apart from cooking, they expressed a desire for sewing machines to create clothes for their families. In response, eight sewing machines were purchased along with materials such as wool, knitting needles, threads, and fabric. A room was designated specifically for sewing, which also served as a safe play area for the women's small children, allowing them to play while the women engaged in sewing activities.

The sewing room brought about a remarkable positive change as some women felt empowered and emerged as community leaders. They took the initiative to initiate conversations about emotions and feelings within the hotel. This valuable information was relayed to council staff enabling them to address and discuss the concerns and issues raised by the women. As women gradually left the hotel to move-on accommodation, new individuals stepped up to continue the impactful work, ensuring its continuity until the eventual closure. Additionally, a crucial aspect involved offering support for local integration, facilitating connections with various local groups.

### **Activities**

A significant amount of time was dedicated to delivering services within the hotel, with a collaborative approach involving council services and other entities who contributed to the weekly schedule to ensure there were sufficient activities taking place. The objective was to enhance the quality of life for individuals residing in the hotel, recognising that some may stay there for an extended period. A range of services were provided throughout the families' stay, including by Breeze, West Leeds Activity Centre, Yorkshire Cricket Foundation, Active Leeds, Children's Services, Families First, Stronger Families, Employment and Skills, Homeless Hampers, PATH Yorkshire, St Vincent's Trust, Health, Home Office, DWP, Story Bus, Ping Pong Pete, the Gary Day Foundation, Invisible Man, Women's Health Matters, GT Sports, Leeds Library, Give a Gift, Women Arise and Oak Church, among others.

Families were supported by local community champions including through donations, presents and linking into other local community activities. Sessions for children including organised trips were significantly increased during the school holidays. All families were able to experience a trip to the coast and for some this was the first time they had seen the sea. Other trips organised were to Yorkshire Cricket, Elland Road and activities organised by Child Friendly Leeds in the city centre.

The team also celebrated key events throughout the year, including Halloween, Easter and Christmas with each child receiving a gift from Santa.

Both hotels in Wetherby and Garforth were supported by key organisations to assist families access ESOL, these included Leeds City Council, Path Yorkshire, English for All, St Vincent's Trust and Community United. Sessions were provided for both males and females separately, with some learners continuing the learning when supported into the community.

Over several months, the Leeds Resettlement team welcomed families and individuals relocated from other parts of the country to Leeds. Simultaneously the service received new arrivals into the

hotel including people from third countries and transfers from bridging hotels that were to close in Coventry, Rotherham, and more recently, the Yorkshire Gateway.

Since the Resettlement scheme's inception in 2015, Refugee Council provided support to service users in the community. This support element has now been brought in house by Leeds City Council, The Resettlement team took over the delivery of this support service starting from 1 April 2023. Ahead of this transition, recruitment efforts were undertaken to hire six project workers who would work in the community, offering support to all individuals on the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), and the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), including Afghan individuals/families who had relocated into the community through the scheme. Presently, there are six project workers functioning in the community, along with a manager, with five of the recruited project workers having previous experience of working in the bridging hotels in Leeds.

In March 2023, the UK government announced its intention to discontinue the use of bridging hotels and serviced accommodation. It also reaffirmed its commitment to assisting residents in finding stable accommodation within the UK in the following months. On 10 May 2023, the Home Office issued Notice to Quit Letters to all residents in Garforth and Wetherby hotels, providing a three-month notice period meaning the families had to vacate the hotels by the end of August 2023. Residents were advised to search for private rented properties, with assurance that local authority staff would assist in this process. The Resettlement team and housing staff worked tirelessly with the residents to identify suitable alternative accommodation, despite facing numerous obstacles caused by the ongoing housing crisis.

The Home Office's new initiative 'Find Your Own Pathway,' aims to encourage families to secure their own housing. The Resettlement team worked diligently alongside the families to identify suitable properties. However, they encountered challenges due to the high demand in the housing market, exacerbating the existing housing crisis. Additionally, there were obstacles faced by individuals in securing properties themselves, such as the Housing Benefit Allowance not covering the rent, landlords requesting additional incentives or higher bond amounts, or requiring the main applicants to have a job with an income exceeding £50,000. These circumstances created a difficult period for both the hotel staff and the residents.

In June 2023, Minister Mercer visited the hotel and met with residents to inform them of the Home Office decision to close the hotels. Leeds continued its efforts in procuring properties to facilitate the transition of families into the local community. Following closure of both hotels, all families moved into suitable accommodation and no family presented as homeless. This was due to the exceptional efforts of the Resettlement team working in partnership with DWP and Leeds Housing Options.

Every year Leeds City Council provide the Home Office with a pledge regarding the number of people they can accommodate and support through the resettlement programme. For the 2023/24 period, Leeds pledged to accommodate 150 individuals. However, it is evident that this number will likely increase due to the closure of hotels across the country and the high demand for Leeds as a preferred destination.

A Family Fun Day took place at the Garforth Holiday Inn on August 16th, attracting families from Garforth and Wetherby. The weather was perfect, with sunshine throughout the day, allowing children to have fun on the bouncy castle, play golf and table tennis, enjoy delicious BBQ dishes, and relish ice cream treats. It was a special day for families to unwind and have a good time, momentarily putting aside worries about their upcoming eviction. One young child even exclaimed, "It was the most amazing day of my life."

Leeds City Council is currently providing support to individuals and families. A weekly drop-in session at the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre on Chapeltown Road is well attended including various services such as the Refugee Council, Housing, Resettlement team staff, and interpreters are available. Service users are encouraged to meet their project workers during this time.



Additionally, organisations such as the Red Cross have visited to raise awareness about their services. This dedicated time allows all the services involved to collaborate and explore opportunities for enhancing the support provided to people on the schemes.

Every Sunday, an Afghan volleyball team gathers to play, the local authority provides support for this initiative. Additionally, teenage football sessions are held on Wednesday evenings. With the closure of the hotels, the focus has shifted towards supporting individuals in the community. There are plans to restart the girls' group and establish new groups based on discussions with the community to identify their specific needs.

## Homes for Ukraine

The Homes for Ukraine scheme (formally known as the Ukraine Sponsorship scheme) launched on 14 March 2022 in response to the crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Homes for Ukraine Scheme is one of three routes introduced by the government to support people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine (the others being the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Ukraine Visa Extension Scheme).

Refugees who wish to apply for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme match themselves with a prospective host in the UK whilst they are still in Ukraine. Guests arriving under the Homes for Ukraine scheme are granted three years leave to remain once they apply for a Biometric Residence Permit and their visa gives them the entitlement to work, study, rent a property and access benefits and other public services in the UK.

The guests stay in the homes of UK-based hosts who commit to providing accommodation for at least six months after the arrival of their Ukrainian guests. Hosts are offered an optional 'thank you' payment, provided they meet the suitability checks, issued by their local council. Local councils are responsible for a great deal of the functioning of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. They oversee the completion of the welfare and safety checks, issue 'thank you' payments to hosts and (from September 2022) support rematching guests with new sponsors if the initial hosting relationship breaks down for any reason.

The 'thank you' payments are made at a rate of £350 to hosts who have guests with them who have been in the UK less than a year, and this rises to £500 for hosts who have a guest staying with them who has been in the UK over a year. The payments are made per hosting arrangement, irrespective of the number of guests staying with a host, and the hosts are not allowed to charge the guests rent, though they can ask for a reasonable contribution to bills.

In response to the scheme, the council established governance arrangements to deal with the crisis, a strategic partnership led by the Chief Officer for Communities and a number of operational groups below this such as Safeguarding (chaired by the Chief Officer Children's Services) and the finance subgroup (chaired by the Head of Service) which were set up to seek and manage resources to deliver the requirements of the scheme.

The staff who led on the delivery of the scheme initially were the Migration team (from Safer Stronger Communities). Although the government set up its own IT system (Foundry, delivered by the Palantir group), spreadsheets were set up to track the progress of the safeguarding checks of the scheme, and IDS started to investigate developing an in-house IT system to better capture the detail of the checks. A tactical decision was made to configure the Mosaic Children's Casework and Integrated Finance system to make the 'thank you' payments to hosts, as this was configurable in-house and could meet the relatively simple requirements to pay hosts directly to their bank accounts.

Other developments included the Together for Ukraine fundraising appeal which raised £158,162. The council worked in partnership with Leeds Community Foundation to administer the funds so Third Sector organisations could apply for funding to support newly arrived Ukrainians and wider

refugee groups over a 6 to 12-month period. In total, 9 third sector organisations and groups were successful to deliver a range of activities, this included improved access to services, housing; benefits advice and advocacy; employability; integration; ESOL and English Language skills; digital skills; increased mental wellbeing and confidence; befriending; and access to essential items. LASSN received funding to deliver a Ukrainian Hosts Support Project. LASSN have over 16 years' experience of supporting volunteers who host destitute asylum seekers in their homes through the Grace Hosting project. LASSN are therefore uniquely placed to offer expertise and skills in supporting people to live with guests and to navigate the challenges this can present. LASSN provided hosts with peer support sessions over 12 months, bringing hosts together to connect, share experiences, good practice, explore challenges and identify support. LASSN have co-delivered training and information sessions with specialists on key areas including housing and move-on support.

Leeds City Council has worked closely with the Ukrainian Community to continue dialogue and engagement and address issues raised, particularly around public health, school admissions and funding. The Ukraine community was successful in gaining funding to deliver a supplementary school for children and young people, this is significant in offering community and support to this age demographic and the centre to coordinate the support of guests. The Homes for Ukraine team committed to deliver ongoing support to the Chair of the community and board members by building their capacity to deliver services and support to the Ukrainian community and hosts. Positive links have been developed with the Welcome Hub at the Reginald Centre to encourage visits to the Welcome Hub to access the range of support. The Ukrainian Community centre board have positively engaged with wider third sector organisations to access activities such as ESOL and wider support services.

Over time, as the practicalities of the scheme unfolded, an additional responsibility fell onto Leeds City Council – the provision of support to guests to find them a new host where there was a relationship breakdown between hosts and guests. This required the team to help recruit hosts who had shown an 'expression of interest' to do so, hence these hosts being called 'EOI Hosts'.

The first tranche of recruitment to provide a team to support the scheme brought in a migration project leader, migration project officer and two migration project support officers (with skills including Ukrainian language, and migration and payments/IT experience). These staff came into post at the end of 2022 and early into 2023 (all staff on fixed term contracts until March 2025) There were also a couple of staff brought in from recruitment agencies during this time to help support the team with the demand.

Funding for the scheme was provided from central government based on quarterly 'Delta returns' that were based on arrival numbers of Ukrainians and the number of 'thank you' payments made. The 'thank you' payments are covered in full, and the council receives additional tariff funding of £10,500 for each Ukrainian who arrived in Leeds in 2022, and £5,900 for any who arrived in 2023. There was also some funding to support the education of Ukrainian children in the 2022-23 financial year.

With the funding received from central government, there was leeway for local decisions to be made to increase support. An example of this was to support hosts and guests through the winter period with an increase of the £350 to £500 for the period December 2022 through to March 2023 (inclusive). There was also some crisis provision of hotel accommodation to guests whose hosting relationships broke down over the festive period.

The second tranche of recruitment was completed in early May, adding a further migration project officer, a migration project assistant and a wellbeing project officer into the team (with skills including further migration and data experience, business support skills and in-team safeguarding experience). This recruitment has facilitated the release of the wider Migration team back to their substantive roles, and the ending of use of Social Care staff to undertake welfare visits.

## **Leeds City Council's Homes for Ukraine Team Responsibilities**

The team contact new hosts and share a welcome information pack with them, containing advice for both hosts and guests, spelling out the offering within Leeds from both the council and third sector. Details of the hosts and their families are confirmed, and we capture their details on shared systems to allow the planning of checks with partners in housing, social care, and the police. A visit is made by housing staff to ensure the property is suitable, safe, and large enough to accommodate the proposed guest group. If there are any issues, the host has the opportunity to undertake any remedial work to enable the home to be safe for guests.

Checks are made across local social care systems, and DBS checks are initiated (basic for those hosting only adult guests, enhanced if children are in the guest group). Leeds goes further than the national guidance in working with police partners to undertake police background checks, that are of greater detail than the DBS system, to ensure the guests are placed with hosts safely.

Any safeguarding issues raised during this checks process are shared and discussed with multiagency partners at a safeguarding meeting, to ensure an appropriately informed decision is made on the suitability of hosts were there were any concerns.

If all checks are clear, or the safeguarding meeting decides the host is suitable to provide a placement for the guests, we conduct a final welfare visit to the guests and hosts together at the residence, where we chat with them all about the arrangement, and our safeguarding officer will tailor advice on the individual circumstances of the placement. If this final safeguarding meeting is passed as clear, we will then initiate the 'thank you' payments to the hosts.

The hosts are asked to confirm the details of the arrangement and their bank details, and payment is initiated via the Mosaic integrated case management and finance system to make the payments monthly in arrears directly into the bank accounts of the hosts. The requests for payment are initiated and signed off within the HFU team, and then processed by the Child Carer payments team via processes that are fully compliant with internal audit controls.

Financial checks are conducted at the six-month mark into the arrangement as mandated by central government, and the ceasing of payments appropriately when guests leave, or are absent from the host's property for more than a month. Where a host has a guest that has been in the UK over a year, a further check is made before an uplift of payments to the rate of £500 as mandated by the governmental guidance.

Since September 2022, where a relationship breaks down due to hosts informing the team, or relationship breakdown, Leeds City Council is responsible for finding the guests a new host. The team will also do this where guests leave the scheme but return to it during the duration of their stay in the UK. The team have to recruit hosts who have shown an 'expression of interest' to do so, and any required checks must be conducted on these EOI hosts appropriately.

Where the guests need to move from their current hosting arrangement, the team either move them in with an EOI host after guests and hosts have mutually confirmed the suitability of the arrangement or support their movement to the private rental sector. The whole scheme is dependent on multiagency teamwork, but the symbiotic way we work with housing colleagues on rematching is probably the best example of this. It is a seamless example of cross-directorate working and a 'One Council' approach.

As new arrival numbers have declined significantly, rematching is the single most challenging area of the team's work. We have an ongoing challenge to find places with EOI hosts to meet the guests' requirements, and finding hosts with more than one room available for guests is especially difficult. Currently, for example, we have no EOI hosts who have more than one room to offer to guests. We have extra arrangements in place to support the checks on unaccompanied minors who arrive from Ukraine. Here there are more detailed checks, many of which need to be undertaken prior to the child/young person leaving the Ukraine. This work is closely supported in partnership with the

Private Fostering team in Children's Services.

Support to hosts and guests is channelled through a dedicated email mailbox ([homesforukraine@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:homesforukraine@leeds.gov.uk)), which is monitored during office hours and now that the team is fully recruited, email queries are usually replied to initially within one day.

The HFU team has staff based at the Reginald Centre on Mondays (chosen as it is so close to the Ukrainian Centre) to coincide with a dedicated housing presence, so we combined a seamless service to guests or hosts who attend on that day. Housing staff are also based at the Reginald Centre on Wednesdays and Saturdays, who we liaise with via MS teams/email if our input is required. Hubs round the city (including Merrion House) also provide housing support if required. As well as maintaining financial records on the Mosaic system, staff in the team also keep the government's Foundry system updated with host and guest information. This system is in constant developmental flux, and the team attend virtual meetings regularly to keep their skills up to date to support this vital data recording. The information on this system is combined with our locally held data to complete the mandated Delta returns to the government, which determines the amount of funding we receive to support the scheme.

On a regional level, we work closely with Migration Yorkshire to ensure that a regional perspective can be put forward. Having a regional perspective is useful as it often means we get a better response to questions or issues from central government, as our requests are coming from a much larger body than just LCC. Migration Yorkshire provides extra support to guests and hosts in Leeds via training, development and promotion to hosts.

The team support hosts and guests with regular communication (mostly via email) to ensure everyone we support are kept abreast of important information, events, support and any changes to the scheme. We also work closely with our colleagues in the corporate communications team to make sure all council channels are used effectively to support the scheme and provide accurate and up to date information. We have worked with the corporate communications team recently on a campaign to say a 'thank you' to the people of Leeds who have been so welcoming to our Ukrainian guests, and we are hoping this will prompt more people to come forward as hosts. This can be viewed via these links:

- [Twitter link to HFU campaign](#)
- [Facebook link to HFU campaign](#)

This campaign has also been supported by colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) who have chosen Leeds as one of four areas to trial a national campaign, and we will work with them to try and assess the effectiveness of the campaign on recruitment.

### **Partnership Working**

The support of this scheme has involved a whole council approach. Although the core of the response has been from the migration and dedicated Homes for Ukraine team, transitioning to the Homes for Ukraine team now that has been recruited to its full complement, there are a huge number of internal and external partners. The below highlights this citywide partnership approach. Internal partners include:

**Housing** undertaking the essential housing checks mandated by the scheme; being key in assessing homeless applications where hosting relationships have broken down; assisting guests to move on from hosting arrangements to entering the private rental sector.

**Children and Adults Social Care Services** undertaking the mandatory welfare visits, provided training to the team and recruitment support; providing invaluable expertise in multiagency safeguarding meetings.

**Mosaic and Payments Staff** processed and delivered host 'thank you' payments; reconfigured the payments system; helped us with local and national reporting requirements.

**Corporate Comms** are instrumental in supporting the council to produce the customer facing communications, critical to the scheme's delivery.

**Finance** managed the budget and worked with the Homes for Ukraine scheme to ensure Leeds City Council has received its correct grant funding.

**Reginald Centre Welcome Hub** provide a focus for guest support; provided practical help to guests at the point of arrival and beyond.

**Employment and Skills** helping to integrate Ukrainians into the city's offer and provide individual bespoke advice.

**IDS** have worked to develop a system to record the detail of our checks and supported the delivery of the scheme until it could be integrated into 'business as usual' work for teams across the council.

**Other internal services** providing general support including risk assessments, audit compliance, business support functions, IT provision, education support.

This partnership also includes several external partners contributing to the delivery of the scheme including:

**West Yorkshire Police** who have been able to turn around background security and safeguarding checks at pace and contribute to safeguarding meetings.

**NHS and Public Health** continue to provide health and information support directly to guests.

**Third sector organisations** – using their expertise and knowledge to deliver support to hosts and guests and building trust and confidence in the partnership arrangements.

**Migration Yorkshire** continue to champion our regional perspective when dealing with the government and providing expertise, support and guidance to the Homes for Ukraine team.

**Ukraine Community Centre** who we have and continue to work closely with to support Ukrainian arrivals.

**Leeds Credit Union** administer the requirement to pay new arrivals £200 welcome payment.

### **Homes for Ukraine Partnership Outputs**

This partnership as at September 2023 has delivered the following:

- 563 properties inspected
- support for over 850 guests who have arrived in Leeds since the scheme started
- 55 homelessness applications processed
- 220 Leeds residents have hosted or continue to host guests for longer than 6 months
- 987 (individuals) safeguarding and security checks by police and on Mosaic
- over 500 welfare visits completed; 142 cases discussed at safeguarding meetings
- 112 virtual and 'in person' 6-month check-ins
- 7 unaccompanied minor cases resulting in 5 eligible minors living in 4 households and new cases being progressed
- completed over 3,200 individuals 'thank you' payments to hosts.

### **Future Challenges**

The scheme has developed under national and international geopolitical events that have meant that the delivery of the scheme is in constant flux. For example, local authorities did not have any responsibility for matching hosts to guests, until September 2022 when a decision was made that rematching was the responsibility of the local authorities.

It is difficult to predict future issues, but there are some likely challenges we will have to meet, including:

- Ongoing recruitment of 'EOI Hosts' to host guests already on the scheme - hosting fatigue and relationship breakdowns are likely to continue which puts the Homes for Ukraine team under great pressure to find and approve new hosts to meet the needs of guests. This is especially acute where the guest group is of a size that requires more than one bedroom in the host's house.
- Many of the groups are mothers with children and/or elderly dependents and these groups are less likely than younger single guests to decide to return to Ukraine. This position appears to be one that will continue in the longer term.
- Reduction in government funding whilst demands on delivery increase - the tariff funding for Ukrainians who have arrived in 2023 is almost half of that of those who arrived in 2022 and additional education funding available in the last financial year has been discontinued. There is extreme pressure on government finances, so it seems that this downward trend could continue, particularly as there have been efforts to save costs in the wider migration sector. The responsibility for rematching, and the pressure to provide accommodation in emergencies where relationships break down and guests need rehousing are costly drains on already pressured LA budgets.

The council continues to await further guidance on the future of the initiative beyond the current three-year visas. The short-term contracts of the staff in the Homes for Ukraine scheme may have to be revisited, or other resources deployed, if the end of the scheme did not neatly coincide with the contract end date of 31 March 2025.

### **Hong Kong British National (Overseas)**

Following the government's bespoke immigration route for citizens from Hong Kong which opened in January 2020 and arrivals to Leeds following the easing of COVID-19 rules, Leeds has seen the Hong Kong British National Overseas (HKBNO) community settle in different parts of the city.

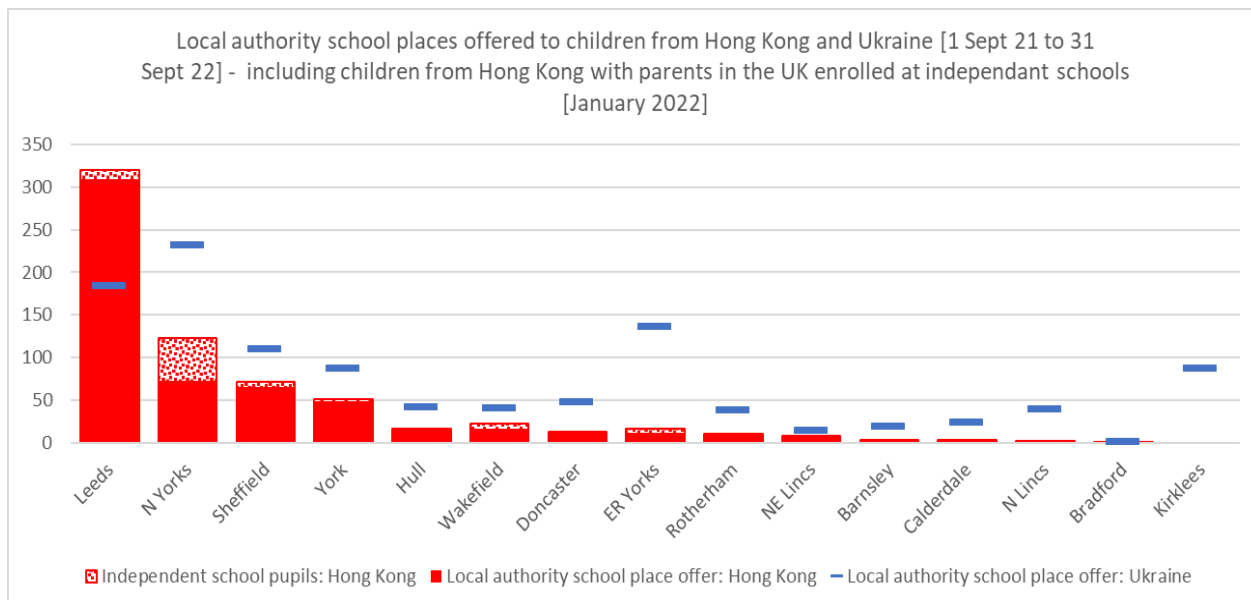
The council has built positive relationships with community organisations supporting the Hong Kong community such as Strings of Life Church, Health 4 All, Café Connect and the Be More Project. The Hong Kong Friendship Festival was held in January and the council supported this event through promotion and guidance around risk assessment to accommodate over 800 people attending. This event was a success and provided the opportunity to engage directly with the Hong Kong community and to share information and gain anecdotal knowledge of how people are settling in.

Age UK hosted a coffee morning for those older members of the community who felt isolated, and this provided the opportunity for older members of the community to meet up and learn more about the support available in Leeds from Age UK. This was well received, and attendees reported they would like support with ESOL and with becoming IT literate. This is further being explored.

[Hong Kong hub | Migration Yorkshire](#) is an online platform for Hong Kong BNOs settling into the region and provides a range of support and information. Migration Yorkshire are leading on the programme in Yorkshire and Humber and work with volunteers from Hong Kong who have arrived in the region via this visa route to be part of the Advisory Panel. The panel members meet regularly to share experiences and concerns of new arrivals from Hong Kong and to advise and consult with key agencies. Migration Yorkshire also work closely with central government, LAs and VCSEs to share information and good practice, as well as providing feedback to central government on any issues identified. The Hong Kong Hub acts as a conduit for the sharing of information and data between central government, local authorities, regional and local partners. They also deliver and commission

additional support where gaps are identified and promote news and activities to the Hong Kong community via their social media pages and newsletter.

Statistics are available from the Home Office on the numbers of people who have applied for visas. **105,200** people have arrived in the UK on the scheme since it began, however, they are unable to provide information as to where they are settling in the UK. Migration Yorkshire estimates that around **5,000-6,000** Hongkongers now live in Leeds. Between April 2021 to March 2023, **728** National Insurance applications from Hongkongers were made in Leeds (this figure would not include elderly residents or those under 16 years of age). Over 300 school places were offered in Leeds to children from Hong Kong in the academic year 21/22.



DLUHC offers retrospective funding for this client group for ESOL and those who may fall into destitution and therefore request the no recourse to public funds condition is lifted. This funding must be claimed retrospectively on a case-by-case basis. No claims have yet been made for destitution support by Leeds. Following partnership work with Employment and Skills, Leeds City Council has started to claim funding for Hong Kong BNO learners.

In addition, DLUHC has funded Migrant Help to offer free advice and support focused on employability [Hong Kong Welcome Programme | Migrant Help \(migranthehelpuk.org\)](#) and access to education and training as part of settling into new life in the UK.

### EU Settlement Scheme

From 1 July 2021, EU, EEA and Swiss citizens and their family members were required to evidence their right to be in the UK by having obtained a valid UK immigration status. EU nationals who did not make an application to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) by the deadline of 30 June 2021, ceased to have their rights protected in UK law. This included rights to live, work, study and access benefits and services in the UK.

Whilst the deadline has now passed, there remains people who still need to apply to the scheme who have not done so. Since the 1 July 2021, the Home Office has been accepting late EUSS applications (for those who were residing in the UK by the 31 December 2020) or alternatively, EU nationals can secure a valid visa under the points-based immigration system.

Migrant Help has been funded by the Home Office as part of a two-year funding package to reach and support vulnerable or at-risk EU citizens and their families to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. [EU Settlement Scheme Advice and Guidance | Migrant Help \(migranthehelpuk.org\)](#)

80,300 EUSS applications have been made in Leeds from August 2018 to March 2023 which is the highest in the Yorkshire and Humber region. The top 3 nationalities were from Romania, Poland and Italy. A breakdown of age for the total number of applications is below:

Under the age of 18	18,750
Between the ages 18-64	60,180
Over the age of 65 years	1,370

A total of 77,960 EUSS cases were concluded for Leeds up until March 2023 with a breakdown below.

Settled status	36,160
Pre settled status	30,350
Refused	7,240
Withdrawn	2,000
Invalid	2,220

The Migration Yorkshire [European Union Settlement Scheme \[EUSS\] \(arcgis.com\)](#) dashboard suggests that there were 2,340 outstanding EUSS cases in Leeds by March 2023. These include applications that are pending or awaiting to hear from the Home Office to conclude. Key organisations within the statutory and third sector are working with many families and individuals to progress through the application process.

The council's GRT team, following a new recording system, have supported 89 EUSS visitors at the Compton Centre drop-in. This figure is over a 13 week period.

In July 2023, following feedback from a third sector partner supporting families to apply for the EUSS, an article on Leeds for Learning was published with a call to action for all schools and academies to provide supporting information to evidence that children have been registered and in schooling at the point of the EUSS application and not only when asked directly by the Home Office (which does not happen in all cases). This served as a reminder to schools and academies that it is always in a child's best interest to provide clear and accurate evidence with all immigration applications given the important role they can have in proving that a child has been resident in the UK.

## Projects, Communications and Engagement

### Council of Sanctuary

The city's ambition of being a welcoming and compassionate city sees the council progress with its commitment to become a Council of Sanctuary following an application for a **Local Authority award**. In May 2023, Leeds City Council joined the [City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network](#) as an unawarded member and signed up to the [City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network pledge](#) which was approved and supported by the Leader and the Executive Board member for Communities. The [City of Sanctuary UK](#) is a national charity working towards building a movement of welcome across the UK, to refugees and people seeking sanctuary. To realise this vision, City of Sanctuary UK support a network of groups, from across all sectors, and have established an awards programme to recognise and celebrate organisations who go above and beyond. In the past, entire cities were awarded City of Sanctuary status, but their approach has recently changed to awarding a number of different sanctuary streams including Council of Sanctuary status.



Leeds City of Sanctuary is led by the third sector who are our key partners to support the council in achieving this award. They continue to share their experience and knowledge of supporting people seeking sanctuary and raising the voice of those with lived experience to influence service delivery.

Joining the network enables Leeds City Council to share best practice; learn from other local authorities on how to manage the competing demands on resources; help strengthen partnership work and to ensure sanctuary seekers' voice is heard at a strategic level.

The council is progressing next steps as part of the [award process](#), following a meeting with the Leeds City of Sanctuary team.

## Migrant Access Project

The Migrant Access Project (MAP) is a council-led project, set up in 2010, that works to bridge the gap between communities and services, by facilitating thematic training and consultation opportunities for new and settled communities in Leeds. After completing training, attendees become Migrant Community Networkers (MCNs) where they are equipped with skills and knowledge to signpost members of the communities to the many services offered in the city.

MAP was relaunched on 9 May 2023, following a 10-month hiatus due to shifting resources to develop, deliver and implement the cross-council response to the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme.

The project objectives and forward plan have been reviewed using the [Leeds Observatory](#) resource to identify areas where higher numbers of residents are born outside of the UK, and considering the priorities identified within the [Strategic, Coordinated and Inclusive Approach to Migration in Leeds](#). The objectives for 2023-2024 include the delivery of 12 thematic training sessions on a monthly basis that will reach out to 120 people; facilitation of an 8-week specialist training programme in Beeston, Harehills and Armley community hubs, aiming to train 30 Migrant Community Networkers. In addition to the above training, the project will work in partnership with services to deliver awareness-raising sessions to improve knowledge of services and increase access for support.

Through partnership working with services across the city, new communities have been recruited including 43 people from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine who have signed up to the project training. The network now represents 46 countries with a combined total of 45 different languages. So far five themed sessions to bring people together have successfully taken place and were attended by 53 people. These initial sessions have included the project relaunch; basic safeguarding training to support small charitable groups for organisational development; a work and money themed session sharing information about support available for new businesses and support for those looking for employment; a wellbeing session. This platform has also given opportunities to talk about surveys which are important for service delivery and encouragement to participate for example, the cohesion survey and the Public Health oral health survey.

The MAP project also works closely with services on commissioned projects. One example is the recent cancer screening project which was commissioned by the Leeds Health and Care Partnership Pathway Integration. The aim was to increase awareness of cancer signs, the benefits of early detection and to inform people amongst different migrant communities about available screening in Leeds. Leeds Health Awareness delivered sessions to Migrant Community Networkers (MCNs), who subsequently had the opportunity to apply for funding through a friendly process allowing delivery of key messages to their communities. 14 individuals/organisations were successfully awarded funding to deliver over 25 community outreach events between November 2022 and March 2023. The activities reached 243 people face to face representing at least 18 communities (including Zimbabwe, Angola, Pakistan, Rwanda, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Jordan, Iraq, Kurdistan, Palestine, Syria, India, Kashmir, Caribbean, Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan). Sessions were delivered in English, Arabic, Pashto, Amharic, Bantu and Romanian. A group

evaluation session and celebration event was held in May to acknowledge the success of the project. This approach demonstrated bridging the gap between services and communities and improving access to services. Further discussions with the Cancer Alliance are taking place to explore opportunities to replicate this approach enhancing strong engagement and opportunities on this important health topic.

The project also participated with visitors from Dortmund in Germany to share best practice and invited 6 MCNs to share their experience of the project. One person said, *'as a single parent I have been active in the community, but men didn't want me on the board of trustees, but MAP helped me, and I now support a group of women.'* Another person said, *'my mum has been involved with MAP for years and she helps the community so much, it inspired me to get involved with Youth Voices, through this I had the opportunity to go to Spain to attend a youth involvement workshop.'* The guests from Germany said they take similar approaches in Dortmund, but they do not have a formal approach like MAP to support new communities.

## Migration Training

The council's Migration team continue to engage with services across the council to provide training and information on a range of migration topics to better inform services of the council's work and approach to migration, the offer of support in the city and how frontline colleagues can support service users efficiently. A range of sessions have been tailored and delivered to council services. In addition, the council has commissioned Migration Yorkshire to deliver 10 sessions of the Introduction to Migration training co delivered with the Migration team to provide national and local perspectives on migration and what services can do to influence delivery and support people. This is offered to council staff as well as to external partners. As at the 23 September 2023, 116 places have been booked at various sessions demonstrating a good uptake so far. An additional session is offered to elected members.

## New to Leeds

The [New to Leeds](#) website exists to help new migrants to Leeds to find their way around, and to help them to understand how to access support. The website was originally developed by Touchstone and LASSN as part of the Migrant Access Project Plus (MAP+) commissioned by Leeds City Council in 2017. It was completely revised and updated by LASSN in November 2022 and can now be translated into 26 languages. The website provides information on a range of areas including housing, money, work, staying safe, health, transport, living in your neighbourhood and education.

## Leeds ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

The draft ESOL Strategy for the city is currently being reviewed by key ESOL delivery partners. The aim is for the strategy to be signed off by the end of October 2023. A small ESOL working group has also been established to map out provision, pathways and progression opportunities identifying any gaps in current provision, to ensure that we have the best opportunity to meet the demands of the city. This work is focussed around the devolved Adult Education Budget grant funding through the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

## Leeds Volunteering Interpreting Service

The Leeds Volunteering Interpreting Service (LVIS) steering group arose from the difficulties that third sector organisations working with asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrant communities had when sourcing interpreting services to deliver tailored and emergency support. There is a huge range of languages in Leeds and many organisations do not have a large enough budget to pay for interpreting. This is particularly the case when an organisation provides a service in response to a new need and is not able to wait for funds for interpreters. Whether organisations

have a budget for paid interpreters or use volunteers, it is impossible to always find the languages and dialects needed. This lack of access to skilled interpreters often means that service providers have to rely on interpreting by a service user's family or friends. This can produce huge difficulties around boundaries and confidentiality. Additionally, when people informally interpret in an emergency without support, they are vulnerable to triggering and vicarious trauma, as well as not necessarily being equipped to provide the level of service needed.

All these issues led to the idea of setting up a wider interpreter sharing project. A city initiative is currently being developed to benefit people and organisations. The LVIS aims to increase the capacity of volunteer interpreters in the city through a project which organisations can access as required. The partnership uses the skills and expertise of Manuel Bravo Project (MBP), LASSN, PAFRAS, St Vincent's, Workers Education Association (WEA – who provide accredited community interpreting courses) and Leeds City Council's Interpreting team and Safer Stronger Communities team, to ensure that there is a holistic approach in providing training on a range of topics, working with people with lived experience, providing opportunities for employment and linking to city strategies.

This project would offer a wider range of languages and interpreters than any organisation can recruit to on their own. This would enhance the service of organisations and improve accessibility, since accessing an interpreter who speaks the right language and dialect can be a barrier to accessing services for a great number of people. Consultation with the migrant third sector and refugee-led organisations has identified challenges and gaps in providing much-needed interpreting services. Further consultation work is taking place to include focus groups with people who have needed interpreters in the past, consultation with the wider third sector and with professional interpreters on their experiences. Further updates on progress will be provided.

## Refugee Week

Refugee Week takes place every year across the world in the week around World Refugee Day on the 20 June. In the UK, Refugee Week is a nationwide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK and encourages a better understanding between communities. The theme for Refugee Week 2023 was 'compassion'. This year, Leeds celebrated Refugee Week's 25th anniversary. Leeds Refugee Forum coordinates Refugee Week events in Leeds in collaboration with refugee communities, agencies, refugee organisations and Leeds City Council.

At a Leeds Migration Partnership operational group, refugee community organisations led a discussion with services on their involvement to improve outcomes for refugees and this included building links with people working in the refugee and asylum sector; raising awareness of services; sharing promotional material and encouraging referrals to projects, group work and volunteering opportunities; joining in the celebrations to send a strong welcome message for those that seek sanctuary in our city.

Many activities took place across the city including a football tournament, local cultural days, wellbeing events, walking, drama, picnics, Leeds knowledge exchange, galleries, sharing stories, gardening, conversation clubs, gatherings, and much more.

The [Leeds City of Sanctuary](#) work collaboratively with institutions such as universities, schools, General Practitioners, theatres, and others who are applying for a City of Sanctuary award. They recently re-launched their group at an event at the Leeds Playhouse during Refugee Week.

## Windrush

Windrush Day took place on 22 June, remembering the 75th anniversary of the day when around 500 migrants from the Caribbean arrived at Tilbury Docks in Essex in 1948. BM Wellbeing Village in partnership with BBSA and Leeds City Council hosted this Windrush event on Friday 16 June 2023. The Lord Mayor was in attendance and many guests attended dressed in clothing relevant to the Windrush era.

The event also included:

- A local artist taking those present on a journey by portraying what life was like at this time.
- A taste of authentic Caribbean cuisine
- A chance to listen and dance to music from this era.
- Hearing the lived experience of a Windrush descendent

## Equality Assembly

The Equality Assembly took place in March 2023. This annual event brings together members of the different Equality Hubs (the council's consultation and engagement forums with protected characteristic communities). It is an opportunity to consider equality, diversity and inclusion in an intersectional way and to hear about key issues affecting the city and for participants to input into conversations on important pieces of work. This year the event saw 150 people from across diverse communities in attendance in the Banqueting Suite and included:

- An update and overview on the migration agenda in the city supported by colleagues from the Migration team in Safer and Stronger Communities and including a lived experience voice
- A presentation and roundtable session on the Future Talent Programme supported by colleagues from Employment and Skills
- A presentation and roundtable session on the cost-of-living crisis supported by the Financial Inclusion team

## Current issues

### Illegal Migration Act 2023

The government introduced the [Illegal Migration Bill](#) to reform the asylum system and in response to crossings made by small boats. The bill covered two key proposals, firstly it intended to place a legal duty on the Home Secretary to remove or at least make arrangements for the removal of anyone who enters the UK without permission to enter or who has obtained permission to enter by deception. The second main proposal was to deny access to the asylum system to anyone who enters the UK 'illegally' making them unable to obtain lawful status in the UK and treated as permanently inadmissible.

After receiving Royal Assent on 20 July 2023, the [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) was published and key changes were made during the passage of the Bill.

This item will be tabled at the **Leeds Strategic Migration Board** meeting in October 2023 to discuss the impact on people and services in Leeds and to explore partnership approaches to respond.

### Conflict in Sudan

In April 2023, tensions arose between two rival military factions, Sudan Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Conflict broke out in the capital of Khartoum and spread throughout the region, destabilising the country. The outbreak of this violence led to hundreds of people being killed and thousands more injured.

The UK government concluded its evacuation operation with the final flight departing on 3 May, concluding the longest and largest evacuation of any Western nation. Over eight days, more than 2450 people were evacuated on 30 flights, the vast majority being British nationals and their dependents.

It is difficult to capture an accurate number of Sudanese nationals in Leeds. Unfortunately, the census data is lacking for the Sudanese population figures and Sudan would be within the North Africa count, along with Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Western Sahara. Whilst this is not the complete picture, we are able to look at National Insurance Number (NINO) registrations to select Sudanese and this highlights that between 2012-2023, 542 Sudan nationals registered for a NINO in Leeds. It must, however, be noted (as above) that there are many caveats to this figure as this represents the number of NINO registrations of Sudanese people living in Leeds at the time of registration, so there is no indication of people who have left Leeds, come in from other local authorities after registration, or of people that have not registered for a NINO including those under the age of 16 years.

Leeds Refugee Forum, located in East Leeds, is well-linked with local Sudanese community groups. In addition, the council's Migrant Access Project has positive relationships with the community through the project's Migrant Community Networkers as well as several others who originate from Sudan and who are directly impacted by these events. Leeds Refugee Forum have continued dialogue with the Sudanese community and have fed information back to council services.

## **Cross-council working**

### **LAASLO (Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison)**

This initiative led by Leeds Housing Services provides support to asylum seekers who receive a positive decision from the Home Office to settle in the city. Leeds Housing Options work closely with Mears to help meet future accommodation needs of positive asylum cases. The LAASLO role continues to be a busy area of work for Leeds Housing Options, and also focuses on supporting family reunion homelessness cases.

Since January 2022, Leeds Housing Options have directly assessed 263 Homeless Reduction Act cases where people have been granted refugee status, and who have been given 28 days' notice to leave Home Office accommodation. We have seen an increase in these approaches during 2022/23.

At the point of when positive decisions are received Leeds Housing Options can start to work with new refugees as they have access to public funds. When single people receive a positive decision, this can create a challenge for those who then apply for family reunion visas, as appropriate accommodation has to be sourced. Our focus continues to be assessing customers, sourcing accommodation, and providing tenancy support for our network of landlords who provide housing for our refugee service users. These service users generally have language barriers and are new to the country, so the support we provide them in securing private tenancies is quite intensive. We are adjusting to the added administration responsibilities as a result of the Refugee Integration Service funding and are weaving these reporting requirements into the Homeless Reduction Act assessments, so all our work is captured and reported on appropriately for the city. In terms of accommodation our pressures remain a lack of two bed private rented accommodation in the city, there also remains a real challenge for appropriately sized properties for larger families.

The emerging increase in customers needing support is due to several factors, the Home Office accommodation provider Mears is continually having to increase its asylum estate which also adds pressure due to there being a lack of affordable, available stock in the Private Sector in order to house people experiencing homelessness within the city. The service will continue to adapt to these

pressures. Where negative decisions are received, local authorities do not have a duty to respond, however Leeds Housing Options work closely with third sector partners to ensure service users are supported.

### **Local Authority Housing Fund**

In order to help local authorities deal with increasing demand and pressure, a capital grant fund of £500m known as The Local Authority Housing Fund (Round 1) was launched on 14 December 2022. The aim of the fund was to support local authorities in England to provide sustainable housing for those unable to secure their own accommodation that met the eligibility criteria.

The Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) focused on recent humanitarian schemes (Afghan and Ukraine schemes) which offered sanctuary via an organised safe and legal entry route, to those fleeing conflict.

Leeds was highlighted as an area which generously welcomed substantial numbers of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees into the city, despite housing pressures. The council was allocated grant funding towards the purchase of 30 properties to provide homes for Afghan and Ukrainian refugee families.

Further to the LAHF scheme, LAHF Round 2 was launched on 7 June 2023. Round 2 provides a further capital grant of £250m to support local authorities provide sustainable housing for those on Afghan resettlement schemes who currently reside or formerly resided in bridging accommodation, and to ease wider homelessness pressures.

In summary, these challenges are expected to continue impacting on homelessness services.

### **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**

Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 states that a person will have 'no recourse to public funds' if they are 'subject to immigration control'. This condition applies to people with leave to enter as a visitor, leave to remain as a spouse, leave to remain as a student, leave to remain granted under family or private life rules and indefinite leave to remain as the adult dependent relative of a person with settled status (where a five-year prohibition on claiming public funds applies). This means they have no entitlement to most welfare benefits, including income support, housing benefit and a range of allowances and tax credits. People with NRPF are at high risk of homelessness and destitution as they cannot access social housing, welfare benefits or legal employment.

A no recourse to public funds panel is led by Children's Services and consists of council-wide services, including representation from the Migration team to respond to families who fall into no recourse to public funds. The number of cases has continued to decline but cases are extremely complex. The Home Office are seeking more evidence around domestic violence cases and are taking longer to make decisions. This results in a greater burden to Children's Services to provide financial support for accommodation and personal assistance. Notwithstanding the reduction in the number of families that Children's Services are supporting via the NRPF panel, we can assume that there is likely to be further hardship for these families due to the low rates of financial support offered by Children's Services as is recommended by the central government which is in line with support offered to people seeking asylum.

### **Destitution**

Homelessness and housing remain the single largest issue in the city for those who have no recourse to public funds. We witnessed the impact during the pandemic where those in work also easily spiralled into destitution if they lost their income. Furthermore, asylum seekers and refugees often face difficulties in having their qualifications and experience recognised meaning they end up in low-skilled and precarious jobs.

The best current indication of destitution numbers may be elucidated from the number of destitute service users who access destitution case work. Two key organisations are **British Red Cross** and **PAFRAS** who support destitute people through casework.

From July 2022 to August 2023 the British Red Cross supported 309 service users with 208 dependents in Leeds with casework and destitution support. During the same period PAFRAS supported 552 service users with 214 dependents in Leeds with casework and destitution support. We know that there are many more destitute people we do not reach that are supported in the community. In addition, these organisations report that there are high levels of anxiety being experienced by those in the asylum system about the uncertainty of the impact of the new Illegal Migration Act, proposed room sharing, Rwanda plan and the large-scale accommodation sites being proposed.

The migrant third sector provide support to access the hardship fund through donations. This fund is essential to ease the financial burden of people experiencing homelessness or destitution.

## **Gypsy Roma Travellers team**

The council's **Gypsy Roma Travellers (GRT)** team continue to make an active contribution in supporting Roma families through twice weekly drop-ins. This is a universal offer where any member of the community can come for support with needs such as school places, child benefit, job seeking, baby items, school uniform, accessing health services. The drop-ins support around 30 individual requests per week and have completed 180 school applications since January 2023. Once per week the GRT team also work in conjunction with St Vincent's to offer European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) application support. The GRT team also conduct weekly street outreach sessions to identify families who may need support who have not accessed the drop-in services.

In October 2022, the GRT team launched a weekly soup kitchen to support families through the cost-of-living crisis. This has been welcomed by the community and regularly attracts 50 visitors each week. The soup kitchen also offers weekly information sessions for families on topics such as dental hygiene and healthy eating.

The team continue to offer family support to families who are in need of additional support and this work is known as 'Early Help'. The team have strong relationships with schools, children centres, and school clusters who they work with to form a 'team around the family' to enable the most useful partnership support.

In Leeds we have a high number of Looked After Children and Child Protection cases where children are of Roma heritage and the national picture tells us that children of Roma heritage are statistically more likely to be taken into care. The team were successful with a bid to the NHS 'CoreTwentyPLUS5' initiative which will enable the recruitment of 3 additional workers who will support these 'edge of care' families. Working alongside social workers to support these families the aim will be to reduce the number of children on Child Protection plans and children placed in care.

## **Domestic Violence and Abuse**

### **Support in Safe Accommodation**

The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act in April 2021 placed a duty on Leeds City Council to provide support in safe accommodation for victims of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and their children. Leeds has been giving effect to this duty by allocating £1.8 million New Burdens Funding each year to a range of projects to support victims and children across the city. This has included additional provision in refuge (including children's support workers) and enhanced support to those in dispersed accommodation and other supported housing across the city. A new Sanctuary

Support Team (SST) has been established to provide support to those who remain in their homes. This scheme draws on the expertise of community-based organisations (Asha, Shantona, and PAFRAS) who have a deeper understanding of the needs of migrant communities. The Safer Stronger Communities team has been effective in reaching communities who face barriers accessing domestic abuse services including those from diverse cultural communities. It has contributed to making victims-survivors and their children safer and to reducing the impact of domestic violence and abuse.

### **Locality working to address DVA**

Following on from the success of the Seacroft pilot in 2021, several Local Care Partnerships (LCPs) and Community Committees are developing local action plans to address domestic violence and abuse. These local arrangements bring together partners who understand the needs of their communities including migrant communities and can develop activity to better address those needs. There are plans now being delivered in Seacroft, HATCH, Cross Gates and Manston, Middleton, and Morley. Initiatives include ensuring that community settings are able to recognise and respond to domestic violence and abuse by extending and adapting the government's Safe Spaces and Ask for Ani schemes that were launched during the pandemic. There are also plans to support the work that is being done in schools to raise awareness and support young people experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

### **Workforce Development and Service Improvement**

A partnership workforce development group has been established, including some members with specialist knowledge around migrant communities, to ensure delivery of learning to partners across the city. There is now a standard multiagency training offer that is delivered by the Safeguarding and Domestic Violence Team with support from a pool of trainers. One of the training options available is the Honour-Based Abuse and Forced Marriage briefing, alongside an Introductory module: Assessing and Responding to Risk and Learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs). The draft Workforce Development Framework recognises the need for learning in relation to supporting people from migrant communities. The Leeds Quality Mark (QM) has been refreshed and the model simplified, so agencies continue to develop their practice to the QM standards, but with a focus on continual improvement rather than evidencing current activity. The aim of the QM is to ensure a consistent and high level of support for people experiencing domestic violence and abuse in Leeds.

### **Honour-based abuse**

A task and finish group is being established to consider learning from recent Domestic Homicide Reviews around honour-based abuse. This will build on the work of the former quality assurance group where police and social workers carried out a dip sample of cases in order to identify opportunities for improvement to practice. The learning from the reviews has shown a continued need to reflect on practitioners' ability to recognise subtle signs of abuse and to increase their confidence to respond and increase the safety of those affected.

### **Improving support to victims of domestic violence and abuse who have No Recourse to Public Funds**

In April 2021, the landmark Domestic Abuse Act passed into law a range of greater protections and provisions for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Despite the many steps forward that the Act made, the Act has been identified by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner as a 'missed opportunity' for victims and survivors of domestic abuse with insecure immigration status. Key amendments to improve the provision of support to migrants, including through the extension of the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) and Domestic Violence Indefinite Leave to Remain Rule (DVILR) regardless of their immigration status, were supported by domestic abuse services and members across both Houses, but were unfortunately not supported by the government. In 2021, the Commissioner published her first report, *Safety Before Status: Improving Pathways to Support for Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse*. The report found that migrant survivors with no recourse to public funds were often unable to access life-saving refuge, meaning they were often forced to stay with an abuser or face homelessness and destitution. The report found that many perpetrators were



using victims' insecure immigration status as a tool of coercive control known as 'immigration abuse', for example, threatening to report migrant victims to immigration enforcement if victims report to the police.

Leeds recognises that although the numbers of people affected are relatively small, any estimate made would be inaccurate as it would only account for those that approach services for help, and not include those that do not seek help, for a variety of reasons. However, we are aware that their vulnerability to harm, risk and exploitation is high. Services are limited in their ability to respond, due to the constraints of no recourse legislation. However, there are other local authorities who are developing responses that increase the safety of this group. We have set up a working group to review practice in other areas and to consider options that allow the council and its partners to increase safety for this group. The findings of this group will be reported to senior leaders during 2023/24.

### **Modern Slavery**

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking can affect people of all nationalities and immigration statuses. However, migrants may be particularly vulnerable to this type of exploitation, particularly during their migration journeys. Further, it is estimated globally that migrant workers are three times more likely to be exploited through forced labour than local workers. The Home Office's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the mechanism through which slavery and trafficking victims can be identified and supported. NRM data for 2022 shows that Albanian nationals account for 27% of people referred as potential victims of Modern Slavery (compared with 20% in 2021 and 15% in 2020). Significantly, Albanian nationals have now overtaken UK nationals as the most commonly referred nationality, with 25% of referred people of UK nationality, and 7% of Eritrean nationality. Other common nationalities of potential victims include Sudanese, Vietnamese, Iranian, Indian, Afghan, Somali and Romanian.

The Leeds Pledge to Tackle Modern Slavery was launched on Anti-Slavery Day 2022 (10 October) and the launch event was well attended by the public, private and the third sector with keynote speakers including the former Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Dame Sara Thornton. A pledge supporters guidance document has been produced and promoted (including via the Leeds Migration Partnership) and provides businesses and organisations with guidance on how to recognise, report, prevent and raise awareness of Modern Slavery as well as how to support victims. The guidance signposts readers to a range of Modern Slavery resources such as posters, leaflets and videos in a range of languages. Following the pledge launch, Modern Slavery Board partners were invited to join the Leeds Migration Partnership Strategic Group to enhance joint working to tackle the issue and provide support within migrant communities. Additionally, Migration Yorkshire and the Leeds Modern Slavery Board have been working together to understand the Illegal Immigration Bill and its impact on Modern Slavery legislation and policy.

### **Locality Working**

The Locality Working model initiated in 2017, sought to establish what the possibilities could be if the council and partners worked differently in specific areas of the city. This was always predicated on the potential to extend the locality working approach to all the city's 1% most deprived communities.

The new model seeks to continue and build on the good work that has taken place so far, by working more intensively in targeted areas of the city to reduce poverty and inequality through the delivery of a range of innovative and new ways of working.

The locality working partnerships are the foundations of the Locality Working Strategic Framework to address inequality and poverty through multiagency place-based integrated and collaborative working. From 2023/24, the Social Progress Index (SPI) for Leeds will be used as an additional tool to measure impact and progress of the targeted work within the six Priority Wards.

Key issues identified for all communities of interest and the general public include, navigating information and guidance; access to essential provisions and services; challenges in gaining/maintaining access to food; essential personal and household items; and accessing support necessary to protect health, care, and wellbeing. Social isolation and boredom; challenges around the loss of social bonds, relationships and contact; the loss of physical and intellectual stimulation; mental health – low level anxiety to crisis; challenges around management of pre-existing mental health issues and the emergence of new concerns; abuse, domestic violence and safeguarding issues; challenges around imposed segregation of perpetrators and victims, accessing support whilst experiencing violence and abuse; concerns about restrictions being lifted; challenges around managing change, uncertainty and the concerns and anxieties which this brings; digital exclusion; communities and individuals having limited/no access to equipment and/or data thus exacerbating barriers to accessing information, support and social connection.

The key challenges faced by organisations who support communities of interest including refugees, people seeking asylum and other migrants are navigating high volumes of changing information and guidance and effectively relaying this to people and communities; maintaining core work whilst also meeting new challenges; supporting people whose inequalities and challenges are enhanced by COVID-19 in addition to increased logistical challenges; identifying and engaging people when there is no access to contact information; a particular concern where there are additional barriers posed by digital communication; changes to other areas of the system and coordination of contact; and access to digital technologies and appropriate training to enable services to continue online. Further challenges are achieving service stability and sustainability, including delivery adjustments, staff absenteeism/training/staff and volunteer welfare and continuation funding. Next steps planning includes an anticipated additional strain on services and changing remits.

Intensive work is taking place in the priority neighbourhoods to overcome poverty and inequalities including the following examples:

#### **Community Garden / Outdoor Events Space in Lincoln Green**

Mafwa Theatre work with women asylum seekers and refugees to support their integration within the UK. Mafwa Theatre have been working alongside Housing Leeds to develop plans for a community garden/outdoor event space in Lincoln Green. The engagement and design phase around this project has brought residents from the wider Lincoln Green Community together with the women refugees that Mafwa support. The new public realm space has recently been completed and will host a series of community events as part of Leeds 2023. The first event in May was very well attended bringing people from very diverse backgrounds together in a quality outdoor communal space.

#### **Gypsy Roma Traveller Weekly Teatime Club**

The Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) service have established a weekly teatime club at Nowell Mount Community Centre. Historically the GRT service have delivered a morning session from Nowell Mount for GRT families, in fact most families attending are from a Roma background. Last Autumn the GRT service piloted an early evening teatime club, partly in response to the cost-of-living crisis. Attendance at this session has been much higher and over the weeks has become a session which is attracting people not only from the Roma community but also a representative cross section of the wider community that live in and around the Nowells. This 'mixed' session is helping to break down barriers building a more cohesive community and fostering better understanding between the local Roma families and the wider community.

#### **Improving wellbeing and engagement in priority neighbourhoods**

Supported pop-up cycling events led by Active Leeds in the Nowells and Cliftons. Community Connectors encouraged engagement with migrant households to participate in leisure activities. As a result, children enjoyed the events and fed back that they would support their children if safer cycling routes were more common. This feeds into the council's wider work around this.

#### **Supporting New Wortley Community Centre**

Whilst many migrant communities live in the local area, they were travelling to east Leeds to access activities and support. This gap was addressed by sharing data and the need for a local support/service provision. As a result, New Wortley Community Centre was successful in a funding application based on the intelligence and evidence the council provided. They have successfully recruited a BME Development Worker post and the council's Migration team supported recruitment. This post is now well established and building positive relationships.

### **Voter ID leaflet delivery**

Due to the new rule that photographic identification is required to vote within an election in the UK, the communities team delivered over 700 Voter ID leaflets to houses in the Holbeck area, in preparation for the local council elections which took place at the beginning of May.

### **Community Safety leaflet delivery**

The Holbeck Community Safety newsletter was distributed to over 700 households in Holbeck on 12 May 2023. The newsletter featured an update from the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Team, Forward Leeds, information on cuckooing on what support is available and an update on the Streets for People scheme.

### **Let's Move: South Leeds**

The first Let's Move South Leeds Festival took place on Saturday 13 May at Cross Flatts Park, with over 350 people attending and enjoying a programme of activities. To celebrate the many ways people can move more, and to see what's on offer across South Leeds, Get Set Leeds Local have been working alongside Communities team, Communities Project Development worker, Councillors, and local partners to develop this new community event. Local providers showcased ways that all ages can be active in and around South Leeds.

Community and third sector organisations, sports groups, local partners put on a range of fun activities including: walk/jog/run at parkrun, cycling, roller skating, yoga, crown green bowling, table tennis, Roller skating / skateboarding, treasure hunt, basketball, football, cricket, paddleboarding, Street Play in the Park, Tai Chi, Police bike tagging and much more.

Free snack bags donated by Morrisons supermarket were available for the first 150 people taking part in the treasure hunt which included prizes for the most involved. All activities were free, and the event was supported by Inner South Community Committee, Morrisons, Decathlon and community partners.

### **Migration and Prevent Training with the Third Sector**

The Migration and Prevent teams have undertaken training in Seacroft for partners working in the ward, to address some far-right attention being focussed in the area with positive feedback and engagement from a range of services and third sector organisations. Subsequent 'Stand by Me' training was also secured and delivered by Communities Inc, which offered information on how to safely support victims of hate crime.

Successful Home Office funding for the third sector was secured following that training and 'We are Seacroft' employed Groundswell to deliver a workshop earlier this year for frontline workers and council partners to build understanding, empathy and resilience and be better informed to notice hateful narratives and in a better position to safeguard schools, families and communities. The workshop, Communities Countering Hate, was based on the real-life testimonies of two individuals from very different backgrounds and how they found themselves involved in extremism and hateful ideologies. The presenters were once involved in Islamist and Far-Right extremist groups in the UK and the workshop explored their personal journeys and reflected on the reasons behind their radicalisation.

Further work is taking place with our Migration team to create a bespoke presentation for the community. This will be based on specific asks from local volunteers to better understand the terminology around migration, legal position, financial entitlements and opportunities to work more

closely with migrants who are placed in the ward. Volunteers felt they needed to be confident in sharing information and being able to myth-bust the negative narrative when in conversation with other local residents and the people they were supporting. A handy guide that they could keep with clear definitions and rights for e.g. migrant, refugee, asylum seeker is also being considered.

## **International**

### **International relations**

In February 2021, Leeds and twinned city Dortmund re-assigned their Memorandum of Understanding for a continued partnership.

### **Urban Diplomacy Exchange Programme**

Leeds and Dortmund twinning was successfully selected to take part in a high-level urban diplomacy exchange programme. The [Germany - United Kingdom - Urban Diplomacy Exchange \(urban-diplomacy.de\)](https://urban-diplomacy.de) is a German programme which aims to reinforce German cities diplomacy and encourage exchanges of good practice.

The Urban Diplomacy Exchange project offers existing German-British city-to-city partnerships as well as cities interested in such a cooperation the opportunity for professional and political exchange. The framework of the project is set by the 2030 Agenda with its 17 goals. Through events, expert exchange trips, ongoing consultations and tailored guidance, Urban Diplomacy Exchange helps German cities to strengthen their relationships with cities in the UK, establish knowledge exchange on specific topics of interest, network with each other and represent municipal interests at national and international level.

In June 2023, Leeds hosted the Urban Diplomacy Exchange (UDE) programme. Opened by the German Ambassador to the UK and including Birmingham (Leipzig), Bristol (Mannheim), Cardiff and St Helens (Stuttgart), and Leeds (Dortmund), the German government-funded programme has run throughout 2023.

Leeds and Dortmund partnership was successfully selected to take part in a focused city-to-city exchange of good practices programme. In this context, the UDE funded 2 reciprocal visits to Leeds and Dortmund to facilitate exchange of good practices on environmental and social sustainability. These visits included a variety of discussion opportunities for both parties and were planned with different schedules according to their areas of expertise including migration and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

### **CATCH and Dortmund Jugending Exchange**

Over the past year, the International Relations team have been focusing on a more inclusive approach to their work. In 2022, the team linked up Dortmund Jugending (a youth clubs umbrella organisation) with CATCH in Harehills. The International Relations team secured £5,000 funding which allowed 8 young people from Harehills to visit Dortmund in May 2023. This visit was part of Dortmund 'European Friendship Days' which was attended by young people from different countries, including France and Romania. Further exchanges are being planned for 2024. This exchange was presented at the UDE conference as an excellent example of inclusive international relations work.

### **Intercultural Cities Network (ICC)**

The development of the [Leeds, United Kingdom - Intercultural City - Intercultural cities programme \(coe.int\)](https://coe.int) work has progressed to develop Leeds as an intercultural city supporting the Best Council Plan (2020-2025) objectives and priorities.

Following the Council of Europe's visit to Leeds in June 2022, a report [ALBUFEIRA \(coe.int\)](#) made the following recommendations:

### **Reflect on interaction**

- Increasing meaningful intercultural interaction between different geographical areas or different groups or communities of people.
- The city could also look into further increasing collaboration with the voluntary and third sectors who already have a strong presence and networks within the city.
- More cultural and community activity that encourages engagement across communities rather than just focussing on one group.
- Cultural and sporting events carried out across the neighbourhoods of the city, including in priority areas.
- Clear inclusive goals to increase access to green spaces in deprived areas, additional collaboration and diverse input may help further the intercultural agenda of the city.

### **Reflect on the education sector**

- Address 'segregation' in schools by more school partnerships and other activities that bring young people together to form friendships across communities.
- Also, education for adults and children about social/cultural expectations and differences and intercultural training for teachers were highlighted as being important.
- Improving the diversity of school staff.

### **Other useful in future developments in the intercultural domain**

- On relevant current strategies, reporting and evaluation mechanisms, to look at them through 'an intercultural lens' to verify there are no gaps. Ensuring sufficient budget is tied to intercultural actions can help further support the sustainability of the policies.
- The need for a communications strategy to promote interculturalism and address racism, rumours, misunderstandings, including community voices and influencers.
- The city could organise technical visits to other cities or take advantage of events and visits with the Intercultural Cities network in order to learn from the practice of others as an effective way of promoting intercultural competence.
- Use existing participatory processes to build increased intercultural interaction.
- General and potentially mandatory intercultural competence training for all city staff could be considered.
- Addressing the structural issues, like access to social housing, where tensions between communities can become acute. Difficult conversations.

Next steps include the analysis of the citywide community cohesion consultation aligning agendas such as the Local Authority Network award under the City of Sanctuary [Learn, Embed and Share principles](#) which will further embed our focus to create strong communities by being responsive to local needs; build thriving, resilient communities and promote community respect and resilience.